



Connecting people to the land since 1895

16 Meriden Road  
Rockfall  
Connecticut 06481-2961  
Tele: 860-346-TREE  
www.ctwoodlands.org

Testimony of Eric Hammerling, Executive Director, Connecticut Forest & Park Association

Public Hearing Subject Matter	Position
<b>Raised S.B. 336:</b> AN ACT EXEMPTING VETERANS FROM THE PASSPORT TO THE PARKS MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION PROGRAM FEE.	OPPOSED

The Connecticut Forest & Park Association (CFPA) is the first nonprofit conservation organization established in Connecticut in 1895. For over 125 years, CFPA has offered testimony before the General Assembly on various State Park and Forest, trail recreation, sustainable forestry, and land conservation issues.

I am testifying today in **opposition to SB 336**, “An Act Exempting Veterans from the Passport to the Parks Motor Vehicle Registration Program Fee.” There are several reasons why CFPA is opposed to SB 336, which would result in a direct cut to funding available to operate and maintain State Parks.

**More people are visiting State Parks than ever:** Every year since the Passport to the Parks began in 2018, more people have been getting to State Parks every year, and Park attendance in 2021 was ~13 million visitors. To cut State Park funding now (when operations and maintenance needs are greater than ever) makes no sense.

**The Passport to the Parks fee is reasonable:** Car owners can afford to pay a \$5/vehicle/year fee (equivalent to less than 2 gallons of gas). This fee is especially reasonable considering that before the Passport went into effect, just one weekend visit to a shoreline State Park would cost any Connecticut resident \$13 for just one visit.

**State Parks support Connecticut’s economy:** In 2020, outdoor recreation in Connecticut contributed \$3.3 billion to our GDP and supported over 41,000 Connecticut jobs ([U.S Dept of Commerce: ORSA](#)). Investment in State Parks, trails, and other outdoor recreational resources is an economic force multiplier that SB 336 would undermine.

**Before the Passport to the Parks, State Parks and campgrounds were on the brink of collapse:** The Passport to the Parks went into effect in 2018 because 4 campgrounds had been closed and State Parks were threatened with moving to “passive management” (i.e. no people to keep parks and campgrounds safe). Returning to a time when State Parks and campgrounds are both over-reliant on the general fund and threatened with closures would be unacceptable.

**If you exempt Veterans, who’s next?** The current Passport to the Parks fee is fair because it applies equally to every vehicle owner. Exempting Veterans or any group from paying this fee would open the floodgates for other groups to request an exemption, and the revenues generated by the Passport would be quickly whittled away.

**It is not fair:** An exemption for Veterans would disproportionately place the burden of paying for the upkeep of State Parks on the backs of other vehicle owners. Why should car owners who happen to be Veterans not have to pay the same reasonable fee as everyone else?

**DMV systems are set-up to track fees per vehicle, not per individual:** It is our understanding that this legislation would require the DMV to incur significant costs to change its systems to be able to track the Passport to the Parks fee by individual rather than by vehicle. This kind of logistical expense of administering special exemptions would add more unnecessary costs and deepen the fiscal losses to the state that SB 336 would cause.

Please oppose SB 336 and ensure that the Passport to the Parks stays intact, with no exemptions or diversions, as was proposed in the Governor's FY 2022-23 Budget and FY 2023 Budget Adjustments. Keeping the Passport to the Parks intact will help ensure Connecticut remains a special place for people to live, work, and play today, and stays that way for future generations to enjoy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this issue. I'd be glad to respond to any questions you may have.